

Castinus

(fl. c. 419 – c. 425)

BRIEFING

Flavius Castinus was an influential Roman general and politician at the court of Emperor's Honorius and Valentinian III, and most likely for some time before. He played a role in several military campaigns in Gaul and Hispania. He held the position of *patricius* and also served as consul for the year 424.

CAREER

Early History

Castinus had the rank of *comes domesticorum*, commander of an elite unit in the Roman army under Constantius III. It has been recorded that he campaigned against the Franks, possibly as a general. It is certain that he had that rank in 421.

Castinus' Campaign against the Franks

Castinus campaign against the Franks was a military campaign of the Roman army in the provinces of Germania II and Belgica I. The campaign was directed against the Riparian Franks, a Frankish people on the other side of the Rhine border. The command of the Roman army was in the hands of Flavius Castinus and took place in the years 420–421.

Sources and interpretation

Almost nothing is known about Castinus campaign against the Franks. The only source is Gregory of Tours, a sixth-century writer who wrote a history of the Franks. For this he used the lost works of Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus as source. Gregory quotes Frigeridus about a Roman campaign led by Castinus during the time of Emperor Honorius. A reason and the result of the campaign is not given, which to all was probably a reaction to a Frankish attack caused by the decline of the Roman army.

Course

Despite the restoration of imperial authority in Spain and Gaul by Constantius III, it seems that border guarding in the north was no longer as thorough as in the period before the Rhine Crossing. According to C. R. Davison, the Roman army had lost its ability to strike. Unlike in the previous period, raids from Germany were no longer followed by punitive expeditions to the attackers' home areas. An other reason may also have been an uprising by Frankish foederati who had partly taken over border control since the restoration of the Limes.

In the course of 419, Frankish tribes crossed the Rhine border and plundered the villages and lands. Eventually they moved up to Augusta Treverorum (Trier) whom they besieged.

Castinus campaign

When the news of the Frankish invasion reached the imperial rulers in Ravenna, an army was prepared. The command of this army was entrusted to Castinus, a hitherto unknown soldier who held the rank of *comes domesticorum*. In 420 he crossed the Alps and led the army to northern Gaul to face the Franks. Castinus relieved the city of Trier and campaigned against the Franks for 421. From Castinus' promotion to *magister militum* in 421, it can be deduced that he successfully completed his campaign against the Franks.

In view of other reports that have been handed down, Castinus returned to Ravenna when a political crisis broke out between the western and eastern part of the Roman Empire over the elevation of Constantius III to co-emperor of the west. In addition to the tensions between East and West, a revolt had broken out in Spain by the Vandals. Castinus was ordered to put down this revolt.

Aftermath

Castinus campaign made an end to the raids of the Riparian Franks, but the result of his campaign was short-lived. A few years later in 428 the city of Trier was again attacked by Franks and put to ransom. Taking advantage of the weakening of Roman power caused by the Roman Civil between 427 and 429, the Franks invaded Belgica Secunda in northern Gaul and occupied the territory to the Somme. The Roman general Flavius Aetius was sent to make an end of this.

In 422 he fought an unsuccessful campaign in Hispania to subdue the Vandals. He was sent to support the Suevi or Suebians, enemies of the Vandals, and came with a force of Gothic foederati. However, the campaign was compromised at the very beginning when, according to one source, "his haughty and inept exercise of command" led to a quarrel between him and the military tribune Bonifacius, a protégé of Empress Galla Placidia. Bonifacius abruptly left the expedition, eventually arriving in Africa, where he began to build up a power base. Castinus continued on to Hispania, where at first he had considerable success against the Vandals in Baetica, managing to put them under a blockade and coming close to forcing them to surrender. Unfortunately at this point the Gothic auxiliaries betrayed him in some unspecified manner, which led to his defeat in Baetica. Castinus was forced to fall back to Tarraco (Tarragona).

The sudden death of the nonentity Emperor Honorius 15 August 423, which followed the death of the more active Constantius III (421) and the exile of Empress Galla Placidia to Constantinople (Spring 423), created a power vacuum "if it can be so described", observes John Matthews, which "was filled, as we should expect, by usurpation." The Eastern Emperor Theodosius II hesitated to nominate a new emperor of the West; Stewart Oost points out that with Honorius' death, "technically and legally he became sole ruler of the whole Roman Empire". Oost also argues that Theodosius reached an agreement with Castinus, where Castinus would act as his vice-regent in the West and in return Theodosius appointed Castinus and the Easterner Victor consuls for 424. If such an agreement was made, Castinus broke it when he joined in declaring Joannes, the senior civil servant, as the new Western Emperor in late 423.

Vandal Campaign in Spain

The Vandal War of 422 was a military conflict within the Western Roman Empire. The war took place in the province Baetica where the Romans went to war against the Vandals and Alans who had settled in the Diocese of Hispania since 409. The imperial army was led by general Castinus and was reinforced with Gothic auxiliary forces.

Background

The diocese of Hispania was placed again under central Roman rule in 418 - after an impetuous period of uprisings and barbarian raids. In the four main provinces, the governing structure was restored, and, with the arrival of new units under *comes* Asterius, the Palatini army was brought back to strength. However, his Spanish campaign of 420 had not been sufficient to fully control the last rebellious Gallaecia province. Although it made an end to the usurpation of Maximus, the Vandals were able to flee and now made the province Baetica unsafe. It took until 422 before the empire started to send an army to put an end to this plague.

Rivalry at the Imperial Court

In September 421, Emperor Constantius III died who ruled the Western Empire together with Honorius. After his death, a struggle for power broke out within the government between Galla Placidia, the widow of Constantius III, and Honorius. According to historians, Castinus, as the main military commander during that period, acquired considerable influence from Emperor Honorius, and played a major role in opposing Placidia. By the emperor he was appointed as *magister utriusque militiae*, i.e. commander-in-chief of the Roman army. This appointment came at the expense of Boniface, another influential officer, who - thanks to his good relationship with Placidia - had the crucial military post of *comes rei militaris* in the diocese of Africa.

Beginning

Campaign preparation

Castinus, as the highest officer, was intensively involved in the preparations for the campaign against the Vandals. From Palitani units of the main army group in Italy, an army force was formed to carry out the campaign and to strengthen it, Gothic foederati from Aquitaine were added. The Gothic troops supporting the expedition were led by local captains. Direct evidence that the Gothic *rex* Theodoric was involved in the events is missing.

Emperor Honorius formally placed Boniface in a position under Castinus, which would add Boniface's *bucellari* to the army. This appointment turned out to be a bad decision afterwards, because the two officers were each other's rivals and soon disagreements arose that led to Boniface leaving Ravenna and went to Africa. He ignored a call to return.

Strength of the armies

Without Boniface *bucellari*, Castinus left for Hispania in the course of 422. Even without the troops of Boniface, he had a large army under him that was deemed capable of facing the threat of Vandals and Alans. The classical sources do not give numbers, but historians such as Heather and Elton estimate the number between 10,000 and 15,000 soldiers (including Gothic foederati). That was big by the standards of the time, but certainly not a giant army like in the 4th century. The army of the Vandals and Alans must have been about the same size.

The confrontation with the Vandals

According to Hydatius' report, Castinus' performance was initially prosperous. In Baetica (where exactly is not handed down) his troops managed to track down and meet the Vandals and Alans. He then prepared to give them the coup de grace in an open battle, but in the execution it went wrong. For unknown reasons, the Goths deserted. Heather alludes this to internal tensions within the Roman army caused by insufficient supplies, while Wijnendaele suggests that intent was at stake. By not sending grain, money or troops, Boniface tried to weaken the position of Castinus. Without the Gothic support, Castinus' troops were decisively defeated by the Vandals. Some historians suspect that the defeated Roman army retreated to Tarroco after the defeat, but there is no explicit evidence for this. They are based on Hodgkin who suggested that Castinus retreated towards Tarraconensis.

Peace talks

Despite the Roman defeat, a peace arrangement was established shortly after that which gave the Vandals permission to settle in Baetica. This treaty would not remain for long, because it fell apart in the years 425-426.

Consequences and further events

After his failed campaign in Hispania, Castinus returned to Italy with heavy losses. His defeat meant a great loss of face. Nevertheless, he retained his position as commander-in-chief and thus belonged to the leading court party in Ravenna. Among historians, the view prevails that the mutual rivalry between Castinus and Boniface indirectly contributed to the failure of the campaign. Boniface's refusal to provide the necessary support from Africa (men and supplies) would have been crucial in this point of view.

The Roman defeat meant that their attempt to expel the Vandals from Baetica completely failed. The Vandals under their king *rex* Gunderic, strengthened their position in Southwest Hispania. They mainly retained control over Baetica and parts of Cathagensis. They settled mainly around the city of Seville (Hispalis). The largest city and strategically conveniently located. According to Hydatius, the Vandals remained active, but their position was uncertain. They had enemies: the Suevens in Gallaecia, the local Roman militias and groups such as the Bagauden. There were also food shortages and pressure from Germanic rivals. When Gunderic died in 428, he was succeeded by his half-brother Geiseric. This one made the radical decision to leave Hispania and cross over to Africa. Three years later, in 429, this crossing took place and a new war began that would eventually give the Vandals control over the Diocese of Africa.

Later career

Joannes was an insecure emperor. The Emperor Theodosius invested his young cousin Valentinian III with the honor of Caesar the next year, then dispatched an army against Joannes. The usurper was captured and executed in June/July 425. Castinus's role in these events is unknown; Oost notes of his "acts during the usurper's reign we hear absolutely nothing." Matthews succinctly states that Castinus was sent into exile; while agreeing with Matthews, Oost adds that a "doubtful source says that he found refuge in the Christian magnanimity of another old foe, Count Boniface of Africa."

Roman civil war of 425

The Roman Civil War of 425 was a short civil war between the West Roman Emperor Joannes and the East Roman Emperor Theodosius II. After rising tensions, battles took place in Italy between the armies of both halves of the empire. Despite this, the conflict did not end by battle, but as a result of a conspiracy in which the Western emperor was captured and killed shortly afterwards.

Background

Already at the beginning of his reign on November 20, 423, Joannes was not recognized as emperor by the eastern court in Constantinople, but considered as a usurpator. After the death of his predecessor Honorius, the nephew of the eastern emperor, he was pushed forward as a successor by Castinus, patricius and magister militum (commander-in-chief) of the western army. His reign was not recognized in the North-African province, ruled by *comes Africae* Bonifatius.

The War

In 424, diplomatic tensions between the two imperial halves continued when Theodosius named his nephew Valentinian as Caesar of the western part with his mother Placidia as Augusta. Prosper writes that an Italian field army unsuccessfully fought against Bonifatius and that the western army was weakened by the losses there. The bucellari, the strong private army of Bonifatius, played a decisive role in this.

Joannes feared an attack from the east and sent his general Aetius on a mission to the Huns for military aid. Before this help arrived, Theodosius decided to take action and ordered his chief commander-in-chief magister militum Ardaburius to overthrow Joannes Reijn. Ardaburius prepared his army, commanded the fleet himself and sent his son Aspar by land through Dalmatia to Italia. The eastern army landed in Aquileia early 425 and took the city in no time. Some time later, Aspar's field army arrived and joined Ardaburius' main force.

Soon after, battles broke out between the western and eastern armies, with Ardaburius accidentally falling into the hands of the western army. With regard to this event, the sources are vague and contradictory. According to Prosper, the imperial court at Ravenna was attacked and taken. John of Antioch, on the other hand, argues that a shepherd led the army of Aspar safely through the swamps that protected the city and that local allies opened the gate for them.

Nevertheless, the captured commander-in-chief was well treated by Joannes. Maybe the emperor hoped to reach an agreement with Theodosius II. According to Stewart East West Ardaburius, during his captivity, he persuaded a number of Western Roman officers to commit a coup against Emperor Joannes, which they succeeded in doing. The Ravenna garrison opened the gates to the Eastern Roman army after which the emperor could be taken captive.

End

After his capture, John was beheaded in May 425 after a hand had previously been knocked off from him. Three days after his death, another battle took place between Aspar and Aëtius, which ended in a draw. Aëtius then entered into an agreement with Ardaburius and Aspar and entered the service of the new Western Roman government. Valentinian III was appointed emperor in the West shortly afterwards. Castinus, the commander-in-chief of the Western Army, was removed from office and then exiled.